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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001271

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH MUSLIM GOVERNORS ON  
POTUS CAIRO SPEECH

REF: A. ABUJA 1053

[1](#)B. STATE 071325

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On June 29 - July 2, Ambassador traveled (with Poloff notetaker and other Mission members) to Northeastern Nigeria, visiting Borno, Gombe, and Yobe. In addition to her pinnacle meetings with prominent Muslim leaders and a policy speech in Maiduguri (reftel), Ambassador met with the Deputy Governor of Gombe State, John Lazarus Yoriyo, the Governor of Yobe State, Alhaji Ibrahim Geidam, and the Governor of Borno State, Senator Dr. Alhaji Modu Sherrif. The Deputy Governor and the Governors were enthusiastic about the election of President Obama and the United State's efforts to increase dialogue with the Muslim world. Deputy Governor Yoriyo agreed with Ambassador that health and education are fundamental to development of Gombe State and asked that the USG extend help to additional non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Governor Geidam shared his concerns regarding drought and desertification. In Yobe 80% of the jobs are based in agriculture, so the climatic change directly threatens the livelihood of its citizens. Governor Sherrif noted Borno's success in reopening hospitals, providing access to water, creating adequate drainage systems, and building government staff housing. Sherrif also said that a significant amount of resources are used for security due to the state's porous borders with Niger and Chad. Finally, Sherrif told Ambassador, that despite attempts by extremists like the Nigerian Taliban's Mohammed Yusuf (who he said was originally from Yobe State) and his followers to create instability, that Borno is a peaceful state and Yusuf is not taken seriously by Muslim leaders or the community at large. However, he noted his serious concerns over Yusuf's activities, particularly his efforts to recruit young, poor men into his following. Each of these states faces significant threats as a result of climate changes. End Summary.

BORNO GOVERNOR TALKS ABOUT POTUS CAIRO  
SPEECH, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

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[1](#)2. (SBU) On June 30 Ambassador also met with Borno State Governor, Senator Dr. Alhaji Modu Sherrif. Sherrif thanked the Ambassador for coming to the Northeast as he said the only way to know Nigeria, and its Muslim society, is to



understand their circumstances based on engagement with citizens. He opined that President Obama's recent speech in Cairo "opened up the world" and said that with dialogue even the most difficult problems, including the dispute between Israel and Palestine, will be solved. When asked about his vision for the state, the Governor said that six years ago the Ambassador would have pitied the state. But that upon taking office he formed a transition committee made up of 28 retired technocrats, bureaucrats, and civil servants to advise him on the State's development priorities. Based on recommendations from the committee Sherrif has focused on four areas: hospitals, water, flooding, and staff housing for government employees. Borno state built several new hospitals, repaired the water treatment plant and dug bore holes, implemented road drainage systems, completed 777 housing units, and has started construction on 1,000 additional houses. The Governor added that the State is also training youth in vocational skills such as carpentry, welding, and tillering. Sherrif noted that security takes up a significant amount of resources because of the open borders with Niger and Chad. In regards to national politics, Sherrif said that electoral reform alone will not change anything unless there is strong will on behalf of the government. He said that it is too early to discuss possible presidential candidates, but that 10-12 months prior to the election the political scene would be non-stop. He asked Ambassador to provide information on solar panels for the purpose of generating electricity in rural areas and for more information on U.S. agricultural exhibitions.

BORNO GOVERNOR ON NIGERIAN TALIBAN LEADER MOHAMMED YUSUF

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13. (C) Governor Sherrif said that Borno is a peaceful state, but that the religious groups led by Mohammed Yusuf is trying to bring about instability by telling people that Western education is evil. He said that he does not take Yusuf's recent threats of retaliation against Borno's Anti-terrorist security program called Operation Flush seriously. (Note: On June 11 Operation Flush officers shot and wounded 17 people during a confrontation with members of the Mohammed Yusuf's sect (ref A). Since then there have been reports that Yusuf was looking to retaliate on the state against the June 11 confrontation. End Note.) Sherrif held that Muslim scholars do not agree with Yusuf, although they worry about his targeting children. Moreover, Sherrif claimed parents who send their children to Borno state to study are particularly angry with Yusuf for trying to influence their children. The Governor said Yusuf is from Yobe but came to Borno 10-15 years ago when he married a woman from the state. He said Yusuf is Manga, but speaks Kanuri. (Note: According to PolSpecialist, prior to attending the Ambassador's roundtable discussion with Imams, Sheikhs and Islamic scholars in Maiduguri (reftel), several of the invited guests inquired if an invitation had been extended to Mohammed Yusuf because they did not want to be associated with him or his extremist views. End Note.)

DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF GOMBE STATE

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14. (U) On June 29 Ambassador met with Deputy Governor of Gombe State, John Lazarus Yoriyo. Yoriyo congratulated the United States on the election of President Obama, "a man of peace." Ambassador presented Yoriyo with a commemorative copy of the POTUS Cairo Speech and they discussed the impact of the speech on Nigeria's Muslim community. Yoriyo said, "we were convinced that if he was elected the world would change, and it is already changing." The Deputy Governor discussed development projects in Gombe, and he agreed with Ambassador that health and education are fundamental to development. He thanked Ambassador for USG assistance in both areas and requested additional assistance for more NGOs. Finally, Yoriyo proclaimed that President Yar'Adua is a democrat who wants rule of law and opined that Nigeria is doing "everything possible to democratize the nation."



GOVERNOR OF YOBE STATE

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15. (U) On June 30 Ambassador met with Yobe State Governor, Alhaji Ibrahim Geidam to discuss the POTUS Cairo Speech. Ambassador also presented Geidam with a commemorative copy of the speech. Geidam welcomed the opportunity to improve "mutual dialogue and respect" and said he hoped that greater cooperation between the United States and Nigeria would benefit both countries. According to the Governor, 80% of the jobs in Yobe State are based in farming and fishing. Consequently, Geidam bemoaned the drought and desertification which threaten the state's agricultural production. He asked Ambassador for technical assistance to increase agricultural yield. Geidam also said the state hopes to attract investors by offering a number of benefits including prepared land, infrastructure, pioneer status, and tax holidays. In particular he noted that there are commercial quantities of minerals in Yobe. He emphasized that as a peaceful state Yobe has potential to grow.

16. (C) Comment: In each of these states, where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, desertification and drought pose serious threats to the population's well-being but we believe that overall the state governments lack the capacity to address the problem. As a result, climate change is likely to have a negative effect on Northeastern Nigeria's economy in the future. End Comment.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS